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ABSTRACT

Equal access to education is not enough to guarantee that all students are receiving the same quality education. Curricular knowledge does not exist value-free; it is affected by the context in which it exists--with teachers, school officials, syllabus committees, and education policymakers, among others, influencing the social process through which students are educated. This paper is concerned with social justice in education, and contends that the curriculum and teachers' work should be given central roles in bringing it about. A model of curricular justice that is based on three principles is proposed. First, in order to prepare all citizens for participation in democracies, social justice requires that a common curricula must be provided to all students. Such an education ideally would involve ungraded and cooperative learning practices in respect to the common curriculum. Second, since the current curriculum embodies the interests of the most advantaged, social justice requires a "counter-hegemonic" curriculum, designed to embody the interests and perspectives of the least advantaged. The third criterion involves the recognition that as well as imparting knowledge, educators engage in a process of producing and reproducing social relationships. This means that "equality" cannot be static; it is always being produced or reproduced in greater or lesser degrees. This criterion of curricular justice involves producing educational strategies that produce greater equality in the whole set of social relationships to which the educational system is linked. A list of 34 references is included. (DB)

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CITIZENSHIP, SOCIAL JUSTICE & CURRICULUM

Paper to International Conference on Sociology of Education,
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Introduction

The idea of 'citizenship' everywhere has two faces, and nowhere are they more sharply contrasted than in education. On the one hand citizenship appears as a principle of regulation and social control, casting citizens into standardized relations of obedience and orderliness. One sees children at the start of the day in North American schools, eyes fixed on the flag, hands over hearts, reciting a 'pledge of allegiance' which is written to sound like a legal or religious declaration.

On the other hand citizenship appears as a claim of rights, as a demand by the excluded for access and participation. So one sees an adult literacy class of agricultural workers in the Brazilian north-east, the educational process being an essential step towards their economic and political advance. In the United States at present there is controversy about transferring funds from school districts serving the wealthy to school districts serving the poor. The 'Robin Hood' policy would not have got off the ground at all without a concept of citizenship to legitimate the claim for equal treatment.

In this paper I will be exploring the second face of citizenship, the claim for social justice in education. I will argue that the way the issue is commonly treated misses what is specifically educational about education, and fails to deal with the main way inequality is produced in Western education systems--through curriculum effects. I will mainly use examples from Australian education, that being the system I have studied most; but the argument applies to all Western educational systems in affluent capitalist countries (and to parallel processes in other contexts).

'Social justice and education' as a distributive question

Questions about 'education and justice' are not new. In the Western philosophical tradition the first great treatise on education, Plato's Republic, was also the first great treatise on justice. In neo-Confucian China, the legitimacy of the scholar-official system of government flowed from open selection to the elite by literary exams.

But we would hardly rest our current ideal of education on elite concepts like Plato's guardians or Confucian mandarins. In modern discussions the issue of 'education and justice' has

been framed in another way. Debates centre on the service provided to the whole population by a mass education system, and are posed as questions of distributive justice.

Questions of 'distributive justice' are questions about who gets what--particularly, who gets how much of some social good. The most familiar 'social good' is money, and the distribution of wealth and income is much debated. For instance, recent research estimates that the richest 5% of Australians own about 50% of the total private wealth, and such figures always raise argument as to whether too much wealth is concentrated in too few hands. That is the classic form of an argument about distributive justice: do some people have too much, others too little? As Walzer (1983) has shown, distributive questions can be raised about a whole series of 'social goods': money, welfare, office, leisure, love, grace, recognition--and education.

(In what follows, I use the term 'justice' in the sense of Walzer and of Rawls (1971), as a question of fairness in distribution for which the normal criterion is equality. There is another common usage of 'justice' in which it refers to getting what one deserves--for instance in 'criminal justice', or 'wage justice'. For the case of social justice in education, the two usages converge. 'Deserts' of individuals may differ markedly, as the criminal law presumes; but it is difficult to see how a whole social group can deserve either more or less education than another social group; so this conception too points to equality. But there is a risk, in emphasising equality in distribution, that it will be seen only as a matter of individual rights. So I confess also to a touch of Platonism, and emphasise that individual equality is the condition, not the goal, of a just social order. The quality of our collective life is central to the argument.)

Over the last 150 years or so, in 'Western' and Western-influenced societies, questions of justice in education have mainly been about access to formal schooling and certification. The 150 years is, roughly, the life-span of state-funded, bureaucratically-controlled mass elementary school systems. Mass elementary schooling has everywhere coexisted with a much more selective (sometimes private) provision of secondary and higher education.

Out of this history came two great questions of distributive justice. The first was whether to provide elementary education for the whole population (an issue now settled in countries like Australia, far from settled in countries like India). The second was about fair access to the selective upper levels of formal education. Secondary schooling was the focus of this issue in industrialised countries for most of this century, but now higher education increasingly is the

focus. We see debates hotting up about university enrolments and overall funding--that is, how much access there shall be; and about university fees and rich students buying university places--that is, about who shall have access.

These distributive questions underlie the two great enterprises in educational justice that have been undertaken in the last generation. On a world scale, justice is pursued by the creation of universal elementary school systems, and the attempt at universal literacy, in poor countries. In affluent countries like the United States, Britain and Australia, the attempt is made to establish 'equal opportunity' in education via scholarships, compensatory education, desegregation, affirmative action, Assisted Places shemes, etc. In Australia the Disadvantaged Schools Program is the best known example of this attempt (Connell, White and Johnston, 1991).

Both of these enterprises generally take the content and form of education for granted. The 'social good' they seek to distribute is the educational service provided by bureaucratically-controlled mass schooling systems of the type created in Europe and North America in the mid 19th century. The debates about justice are about who gets how much of this service (as measured, for instance, by that staple variable in survey research, 'years of education'). What the service is, is debated in a separate theatre altogether--the theatre of curriculum theory, teaching method and the psychology of learning.

This becomes very clear when education authorities make explicit statements about their efforts on behalf of the disadvantaged. In the late 1980s the Australian Labor Party, faced with an increasingly disillusioned rank-and-file, sought to formulate a 'social justice' policy. Education was included in the resulting policy statements, which are important as the clearest recent formulations of the issue of justice in Australian education. A careful look at these documents shows that they remain within the distributive framework. Here, for instance, is the 'overall objective' of equity policy in higher education as formulated in A Fair Chance For All:

> To ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole. (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990)

Such statements raise scarcely any questions about what kind of education is being provided; that is taken for granted. The issue they address is who gets how much of the familiar product.

Distribution and content

The underlying weakness of this approach to educational justice is its indifference to the nature of education itself. For education is a social process in which the 'how much' cannot be separated from the 'what'. There is an inescapable link between distribution and content.

I learnt this in the research for Making the Difference (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett, 1982). Starting from the idea that the unequal distribution of education between social classes had to do with differences between working-class and ruling-class families, we found this was so only because they had different relationships with a particular kind of curriculum. The hegemonic curriculum in Australian high schools has a class history embedded in it, and operates to include and exclude students on class lines. Broadly similar conclusions were being reached on the basis of research in France, the United States, Britain and Canada (cf. Whitty 1985).

It follows that justice cannot be achieved by distributing the same amount of this standard good to children of all social classes. Education is not an object, like a bag of wheat or a computer; it is a human social relationship. That 'good' means different things to ruling-class and working-class children, and will do different things for them (or to them).

This is a crucial point, and one where the argument often stalls. Surely knowledge is knowledge, science is science, great literature is great literature--and the school (on behalf of the society) wants children to acquire them?

To understand the problem, we must look at where curricular knowledge comes from. The case of natural science is instructive. As Kuhn (1970) and other historians and sociologists of science have shown, scientific knowledge does not exist as isolated facts, and is not produced by isolated geniuses struck by wandering apples. Scientific knowledge comes in large chunks--paradigms, disciplines, theories, research programs, etc.--and is produced in a highly organised social process. Research communities, research institutions, communications networks, are the vital social mileux for scientific knowledge to be produced.

These social milieux are located in social structures, and are necessarily shaped by them. There is a powerful (though complex) link between the rise of modern physical science and the rise of modern capitalism. Some fascinating recent research has shown there is also a link with gender (Harding 1986, Keller 1985, Merchant 1983). Western physical sciences were constructed specifically by men, through practices and understandings reflecting men's dominant place in the

social and natural world. In areas like medical science this involved a conscious, and largely successful, attack on healing practices and understandings of health associated with women.

Once produced, knowledge still has to be selected or compiled to make a curriculum. This too is a social process, it is not done in heaven by a committee of epistemological angels. Another fascinating body of historical research has traced the creation of school 'subjects' like 'geography' by inquiries, syllabus committees, academic entrepreneurs, and bureaucrats (Goodson 1985, 1988). Research has traced struggles for space in the schools' offerings, struggles over prestige and dominance for particular bodies of knowledge. Herbert Spencer's 1859 essay 'What Knowledge is of Most Worth?', arguing the case for natural science against classics, is one of the great moments in this struggle. Taken-for-granted ideas about what are 'basic skills', what are the 'core' areas of knowledge, how knowledge itself is divided, are all the products of an intricate politics shaped by the wider distribution of social power.

Once compiled, curriculum knowledge does not float about the school as a kind of academic ectoplasm. It is a curriculum only so far as it is embodied in the school's educational practices. Curriculum is not only a statement of what is to be learnt by the students, it is also a definition of the teacher's work--it describes a labour process (Connell 1985, Apple 1986). It is therefore unavoidably shaped by the organisational and industrial imperatives of the school and school system, and by the occupational and professional needs of teachers as a workforce.

A key product of these imperatives is a system of assessment and educational selection. The importance of assessment in controlling and shaping curriculum knowledge is historically shown in the role of matriculation-level examinations, from the Leaving Certificate to the Higher School Certificate, in shaping Australian secondary education as a whole (Clarke 1987, 1990; WF Connell 1991). It is currently shown by the importance that conservatives in the United States, up to and including President Bush, attach to the installation of a national standardized testing system as a means of control over schools.

Assessment systems are potent because they shape the <u>form</u> of the curriculum as well as its more obvious <u>content</u>. An individualized, competitive assessment system shapes learning as the individual appropriation of reproducible items of knowledge and the individual cultivation of skills.

This has important consequences for justice. Such a conception of learning produces, as

a cultural effect, a belief in the unequal educational merit of individual students--as, for a wide variety of reasons, their appropriation of knowledges and cultivation of skills proceeds at different paces and along different paths. In turn the conception of unequal merit (intelligence, learning capacity, talent, diligence, educability, achievement--there are innumerable variants on the idea) validates unequal offers of education.

Streaming, tracking, talented child programs, selection for university, scholarships, honours programs, selective high schools, assisted places schemes, accelerated promotion--indeed most of the affronts to substantive equality of provision in public schooling--are routinely justified by the notions of unequal merit which are generated by the competitive academic curriculum and its individualized competitive assessment system. This justification is now so routine that we see the astonishing spectacle of educational 'reformers' claiming that 'talented children' (most of whom come from advantaged social groups) are among the disadvantaged unless they get a special deal which will increase their advantages. Here the social agenda embedded in a particular curriculum form has suddenly become visible.

It is also highly visible where the curriculum is exotic and new. In many third-world countries the importation of Western education, centered on the familiar academic curriculum and individualized assessment, has resulted in severe struggles for educational advantage. And in every part of the world where the social consequences have been investigated, class inequalities are found (see eg. Foster 1980). The issues are global in scale.

Curricular justice: three principles

These facts about education systems require us to re-think 'social justice in education' in ways that give a central place to curriculum, and thus to teachers' work. We need an account of what might be called curricular justice. Such a concept, based on the way social effects are embedded in the curriculum-as-practised, would give us guidelines for building-in considerations of justice while making and remaking curricula. I wish to suggest three principles that, taken together, might constitute a model of curricular justice.

(1) Participation and common schooling. School systems commonly claim, in statements

of goals, to be preparing future citizens for participation in a democracy. Thus the Australian Education Council, the ministers of education in Australian state and federal governments, included in their recent declaration of ten 'National Goals' for Schooling in Australia:

> To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context. (Australian Education Council 1989)

If we take this purpose seriously, it has major implications for curriculum. The notion of 'democracy' implies collective decision-making on major issues in which all citizens have, in principle, an equal voice. Major issues in modern states include war and peace, investment, employment policy, urban development and environmental protection, sexual violence, social welfare provision, the content of mass communication, and the design of education systems.

To be active participants in such decision-making requires a range of knowledge and skills (including the skill of getting more knowledge). This range is required for all citizens, as Walzer forcefully argues. You cannot have a democracy in which some 'citizens' only receive decisions made by others. That is why feminists are right in pointing out that a society in which men routinely exert control over women is no democracy (for the history of this issue see Pateman 1988).

Here then is the basis of a common curriculum which must be provided to all students as a matter of social justice. This is a much stronger criterion than the invocations of 'democracy' in Corporate Goals imply. This criterion rules out all selection, competitive assessment, streaming and classifying mechanisms in schooling while the common curriculum is in operation, since such mechanisms would tend to differentiate content and therefore advantage some citizens over others. It points, rather, to ungraded and cooperative learning practices in respect of the common curriculum. They should be cooperative, since all participating citizens are advantaged (as citizens of a democracy) by each others' learning. In this respect, justice would be significantly advanced by banning all grading and competitive testing during the compulsory years of schooling.

Since a necessary part of the knowledge and skills of participants in democracy is an understanding of the cultures and interests of the other participants, this criterion also rules out curricula produced from a single socially-dominant standpoint. It points firmly towards the

principle of the 'inclusive curriculum' proposed by Blackburn and others (1985): curricula which include and validate the experiences of women as well as men, Aborigines as well as whites, workers as well as professionals. The attempt to produce a 'diverse' or 'multicultural' curriculum in the United States, currently resisted by conservatives with rhetoric against 'political correctness', is clearly supported by this principle.

(2) The interests of the least advantaged. Rawls in A Theory of Justice (1971) proposes that education must specifically serve the interests of the 'least favoured' groups in society. The principle of advantaging the least advantaged is central in Rawls' general theory, and captures what is usually meant in public politics by talk of 'social justice', even in the limited sense of Social Justice policy statements.

This principle too has strong implications for curriculum. They become clear when we think about the social history of curriculum and the way the current hegemonic curriculum embodies the interests of the most advantaged. Justice requires a counter-hegemonic curriculum, designed to embody the interests and perspectives of the least advantaged.

What this might mean concretely is being worked out by teachers in a variety of settings: the Disadvantaged Schools Program, multicultural education, programs for girls, Aboriginal education, certain adult literacy programs. In this paper I can only gesture towards this important work and make two general points about it.

First, social justice is not satisfied by curriculum ghettos. Separate-and-different curricula have some attractions, but leave the currently hegemonic curriculum in place. Social justice requires moving out from the starting-point to reconstruct the mainstream to embody the interests of the least advantaged in a generalized way. (For the logic of counter-hegemonic curriculum, see Connell 1988).

Second, social justice is not satisfied with one counter-hegemonic project. Contemporary social science recognises, as contemporary social practice does, a number of major patterns of inequality: gender, class, race, ethnicity, and (on a world scale) nationality. Curricular justice requires counter-hegemonic projects across this whole spectrum. In practice there will be great diversity in what is undertaken. I am not trying to lay down a blueprint here, but to indicate the scope of the principle of curricular justice. No institutionalized pattern of social inequality is in

principle exempted from it.

To recognise that knowledge can be organised differently, and that different ways of constructing it will advantage and disadvantage different groups, is to risk falling into relativism. There have been education systems where the political outcome is the key criterion for curriculum choice. It is important to avoid this, as it would abandon the element of independent truth in, for instance, scientific accounts of the world; and therefore the possibility of critique of the political agenda itself. (To notice that these accounts are shaped by gender and class is not to say that gender and class is their only content; they also document an encounter of a gender-and-class-shaped consciousness with the natural world.)

The principle of the interests of the least advantaged provides a clear motive for avoiding relativism, since it cannot be in their interest to continue being excluded from that knowledge of the natural world that is embodied in conventional science. A counter-hegemonic curriculum must include the generalisable part of the conventional curriculum, guaranteeing all students access (hopefully, critical access) to scientific methods and findings.

(3) The historical production of equality. There seems to be a contradiction between the criterion of participant citizenship, requiring common curriculum, and the principle of pursuing the interests of specific groups, the least advantaged. This could logically be resolved by using one of Rawls' devices and introducing a 'lexical ordering' of the principles of curricular justice. Thus we might say that participation has priority, and the criterion of the least advantaged applies after the participation criterion is satisfied. This would rapidly lead to educational absurdity. It would assume the curriculum can be partitioned into 'participant citizenship' and 'counter-hegemonic' bits, a distinction that is impossible to maintain in the realties of teachers' daily work in schools.

If a counter-hegemonic criterion is to be practically useful it must apply to the same educational processes that the participant citizenship criterion applies to, and we must find a way to think these criteria together. The tension between them can be handled (though not eliminated) if we take note of the historical character of the social structures producing inequality. Their 'existence' is not that of objects like stones or planets, but is a process of producing and reproducing social relationships.

This means that 'equality' cannot be static; it is always being produced in greater or lesser degrees. We must think of the social effects of curriculum as the historical production of more (or, as the case may be, less) equality. Participant citizenship and counter-hegemonic criteria can now be seen as elements in the same historical process; we deal with the tension between them in making strategic judgments about how to advance equality. The criterion of curricular justice is the tendency of an educational strategy to produce more equality in the whole set of social relations to which the educational system is linked.

It is difficult to give a capsule example of such a complex set of relationships, but the general idea might be illustrated by Australian educational intervention in South-East Asian countries. In recent years this has come to be seen as an export industry based on fee-paying students. The 'export' of Australian education to South-East Asia in such terms reproduces over time the privileges of the urban elites in those countries, who can afford to buy professional education for their children. It promotes development, but not democratic control of development. As Duke (1986) points out, its social consequences are quite different from those of aid which works at the village level through informal adult education and institution-building. This kind of education functions to raise the villagers' capacity to articulate their own needs and pursue them over time. One is not surprised to find the elite model is more acceptable to the governments of affluent Western countries.

Unjust curricula

Principles of curricular justice should help in a negative way too, to identify aspects of educational practice that should be opposed.

(1) The principle of participant citizenship is negated when the curriculum include practices which allow some groups to gain a greater share in social decision-making.

This may be direct or indirect. Directly, formal education gives social advantages through credentialism, where educational certification is linked to closed labour markets. Curricular practices that give particular social groups superior access to credentials (e.g. academic streaming, which is known to be class- and race-linked) are to that extent unjust.

Indirectly, education may give background legitimacy to the authority or power of

advantaged social groups. Privileged classes are legitimated where their representatives are given particular authority in curriculum decision-making - e.g. elite private schools having representatives on boards and committees that determine system-wide curriculum guidelines, where disadvantaged schools have no such representatives. The privileged position of men in gender relations is legitimated (among many other ways) by physical education curricula which highlight competitive sports; given that the main competitive sports are showcases of a dominating masculinity and have the effect of 'naturalising' the superiority of men over women (Messner and Sabo 1990).

(2) The principle of the interests of the least advantaged is negated by any curriculum practice which confirms or justifies their disadvantage. There have been many forms of curriculum for slavery, with the message of the 1848 hymn:

> The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them, high or lowly,
> And order'd their estate.

Histories of education (eg Miller 1986) are full of tragi-comic quotes of this kind, consigning girls to domestic science, workers' children to training in deference and useful labour, Aboriginal children to godliness, cleanliness and semi-literacy.

Nowadays no education authority in its right mind would admit to 'ordering their estate', not intentionally. But they do it all the same. When teachers in NSW public schools objected in 1990 to the 'Basic Skills Test' on the grounds that it mandates failure for the majority, and when teachers in disadvantaged schools criticised competitive testing in general because of its dire effects on children in poverty (Connell, Johnston & White 1991) they were making this point.

So were teachers who have criticized streaming because of its effects on the children streamed down:

> Here at this school, my very first day with the children having the tests, and then next day putting them into groups, and seeing the children sitting around. And straight away they knew which was the best group, which was the worst group. And hearing a little girl say that she hadn't been picked for any group yet: 'Oh, I hope I get in this group', and 'Oh,

that must be the good group because such-and-such is in it'. And then the last group called out, and she was in it. The dejected way, on the second day of the school year, that she went to that class, knowing that it was the dummy class--that was dreadful. And for all the good things that go with streaming, I would never advocate it, because of that. (Quoted in Connell 1985:17)

(3) The principle of the historical production of equality is negated when socio-educational change in that direction is blocked. The recent expansion of selective schooling in NSW, a macro-streaming of the secondary curriculum, is an obvious case. The government's intention here seems to be to produce more inequality.

Less obvious, but more common in educational history, is the blocking of change by the codification of culture. Curricular practices involve injustice when they reduce people's capacity to remake their world. The death of a sense of possibility may be as effective as any positive propaganda for slavery.

All curricula involve codification, of course. But some rest on closed bodies of knowledge and define teaching as authoritative instruction in fixed content, others embrace cultural change and explore the creation of new meaning. Music teaching provides an interesting illustration, with its tension between a closed codification (the authoritative curriculum of the conservatories) and an open one (usually based on rock performance). Literature is an important case where an authoritative codification--the 'canon' of literary classics--has come under increasing criticism for excluding the voices of the less powerful (eg Brett 1984).

The strategy of empowerment

I have been arguing that large questions about the political meaning of education centre on the way teachers' labour is constructed and controlled; that we do not have to take a 'social reproduction' view of this matter; that we can think systematically about the potential for social justice in the organisation of curriculum. The social analysis of education can, in fact, be of practical use to teachers.

The condition for this is teachers' willingness to be realistic about society: to acknowledge that educational work starts in contexts of inequality. It is essential to reject the complacency of

official statements such as the Australian Education Council's invocation of 'our democratic Australian society' (quoted above). The assumption that the society is already fully democratic, that children simply need to be trained up as participants in it, turns the idea of 'citizenship' towards a logic of regulation, ordering the formation of persons to sustain existing social relations. It obliterates the principle of education as cultural critique that is central to educational philosophy from Plato to Dewey (1916) to the present; and it invites teachers to become collaborators in the reproduction of injustice.

Given an awareness of social inequality, the project of education as cultural critique implies the empowerment of the disempowered. This idea is familiar in contexts like Freire's (1972) concept of conscientization, and in the idea of a 'pedagogy of possibility' being explored now by some North American educators (eg Giroux and Simon, 1989).

Here 'mainstream' education discussion has something to learn from AIDS prevention education. An epidemic disease is, institutionally, medical business, so prevention education was initially designed on a medical model. Authoritative doctors, or their media simulacra, told ignorant or wilful patients (or 'risk groups') what to do. Individual 'behaviour change' was the goal sought.

But from early in the 1980s gay communities developed other educational models. These centred on 'peer education' and collective community action. It was from the socially marginalized gay communities, not medical authorities, that the most effective prevention strategy, 'Safe Sex', emerged (Dowsett 1990). Gay men have responded to the epidemic by attempting to increase their collective capacity to act, and specifically to act in a communal way. Change is pursued not just at the level of individual 'behaviour change', but at the level of culture and institutions. The strategy tried to make 'safe sex' normative in gay milieux, tried to change the pattern of communication about AIDS, and alter the symbolism of the disease to emphasise the capacity of 'victims' to act on their own situation.

This educational effort, however, has mostly been confined to affluent milieux. There is much less mobilization among working-class men who have sex with men (Connell, Dowsett et al. 1991). Here AIDS educators need to learn from debates around schooling. The complexities of 'empowerment' are apparent in the case of working-class secondary schooling. Some reform proposals, including our own in Making the Difference, have urged the creation of a 'working-

class curriculum' more organic to working-class life than the academic curriculum is. This has been criticized on the grounds that it would exclude working-class kids from 'powerful knowledge' of the kind validated in the universities--natural science, economics, and the like.

The criticism perhaps blurs a notion of intellectual power with one of social recognition. Nevertheless it states an important limit in making a counter-hegemonic curriculum. One is not free simply to set up an alternative curriculum. The counter-hegemonic curriculum must incorporate and rework the core of the hegemonic curriculum.

This is important, among other things, because of teachers' relationship to that curriculum. Teaching as a professional occupation has historically formed around teachers' expertise defined by the academic curriculum. To ask teachers to junk it outright would be to ask them to abandon teacher professionalism, together with the industrial strength (however limited) and the occupational identity that professionalism gives them. Rather, the approach I am suggesting would suggest a larger professionalism in which occupational knowledge and occupational ethics are expanded from the interactions of the classroom to include the consequences of those interactions.

That this kind of re-thinking is a practical possibility is shown by the 'Essential Curriculum' project in Sydney (Ryan and Davey 1990). In this project, a team of teachers from disadvantaged schools have re-thought curriculum content across the board in the light of a set of agreed principles about the social purposes of schooling. Starting with existing syllabuses, recasting their content via analysis of essential common learning, the result is a specification of a teaching program which is immediately practicable in schools as they are, but also has a logic of empowerment of disadvantaged students built into it.

This is only one example of a curriculum logic that has in principle very wide application. Whether it gets widely applied in practice is an open question. The mobilisation of neo-conservative ideas in education around standardized testing and the commodification of schooling is directly antagonistic to these possibilities. No one who looks at the current political scene in the OECD countries will imagine that educational progress will be easy. But the emergence in recent years of a richer and more educational understanding of the issue of educational inequality is promising.

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